

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel issued claims 1-31 and replace them with the following new claims.

32. (New) An article of manufacture comprising:

a starch-bound cellular matrix comprising a starch-based binder and fibers dispersed throughout the starch-bound cellular matrix, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix degrades after prolonged exposure to water; and

a biodegradable coating on at least a portion of the starch-bound cellular matrix.

33. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the biodegradable coating is selected from the group consisting of cellulosic ethers, cellulose acetate, other biodegradable cellulose-based polymer materials, biodegradable polyamides, polyvinyl alcohol, polyvinyl acetate, polylactic acid, polyhydroxybutyrate-hydroxyvalerate copolymer, other biodegradable polyesters, soybean protein, other biodegradable polymers, and mixtures of the foregoing.

34. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the coating is applied to the starch-bound cellular as a liquid which subsequently hardens to form a liquid-tight barrier.

35. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the coating is applied to the starch-bound cellular matrix as a laminating material.

36. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 35, wherein the laminating material is applied in the form of a substantially uniform film.

37. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 35, wherein the laminating material is applied in the form of a sheet.

38. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix includes an outer skin portion having a density and an interior foam portion having a density that is significantly lower than the density of the outer skin portion.

39. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the fibers have an aspect ratio greater than about 10:1 and a length greater than about 1.5 mm.

40. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the fibers are included in an amount in a range from about 2% to about 80% by weight of the starch-bound cellular matrix.

41. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix has a wall thickness in a range from about 0.5 mm to about 5 mm.

42. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix has a wall thickness in a range from about 1 mm to about 3 mm.

43. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix further includes an inorganic filler dispersed therein.

44. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 43, wherein the inorganic filler is included in an amount in a range from about 20% to about 90% by weight of the starch-bound cellular matrix.

45. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix has a density in a range from about 0.05 g/cm³ to about 1 g/cm³.

46. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix has a density in a range from about 0.1 g/cm³ to about 0.5 g/cm³.

47. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 32, wherein the starch-based binder includes a native starch or starch derivative that has been gelatinized during molding.

48. (New) An article of manufacture comprising:

a starch-bound cellular matrix comprising a starch-based binder and fibers dispersed throughout the starch-bound cellular matrix, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix has a thickness of less than about 5 mm and degrades after prolonged exposure to water; and
a biodegradable coating on at least a portion of the starch-bound cellular matrix.

49. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 48, wherein the biodegradable coating is selected from the group consisting of cellulosic ethers, cellulose acetate, other

biodegradable cellulose-based polymer materials, biodegradable polyamides, polyvinyl alcohol, polyvinyl acetate, polylactic acid, polyhydroxybutyrate-hydroxyvalerate copolymer, other biodegradable polyesters, soybean protein, other biodegradable polymers, and mixtures of the foregoing.

50. (New) An article of manufacture comprising:

a starch-bound cellular matrix comprising a starch-based binder and fibers dispersed throughout the starch-bound cellular matrix, wherein the starch-bound cellular matrix includes an outer skin portion having a density and an interior foam portion having a density that is significantly lower than the density of the outer skin portion; and

a biodegradable coating on at least a portion of the starch-bound cellular matrix.

51. (New) An article of manufacture as defined in claim 51, wherein the biodegradable coating is selected from the group consisting of cellulosic ethers, cellulose acetate, other biodegradable cellulose-based polymer materials, biodegradable polyamides, polyvinyl alcohol, polyvinyl acetate, polylactic acid, polyhydroxybutyrate-hydroxyvalerate copolymer, other biodegradable polyesters, soybean protein, other biodegradable polymers, and mixtures of the foregoing.